



LABOR MARKET AND WORKFORCE REPORT

Companion Toolkit

Produced for the Delta Regional Authority
CREC with EntreWorks Consulting – October 2021

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About this Toolkit

This toolkit is a companion to the “Labor Market and Workforce Report” submitted to the Delta Regional Authority by the Center for Regional Competitiveness (CREC) and EntreWorks Consulting in October 2021. The October 2021 report identified trends across the entire Delta Region but recognized that economic development and poverty reduction depends on local development leaders having a sophisticated understanding of their local industries, labor market, commute patterns, and populations.

Learn About Your Region

The following resources are starting points for local practitioners wishing to explore or grow industry partnerships and training pathways. Many of the publicly-available resources here are continuously updated, ensuring that local leaders have up-to-date information to generate insights. These resources can be used to prompt discussion of the specific economic dynamics of a local area, though some of them (such as the data on skills) are based on nationwide trends, meaning local verification is paramount.

The toolkit aims to support local development leaders in their efforts to bring together multiple partners and perspectives, using this information as a jumping off point to spark further discussion. In the **Bringing it Together** section, below, we discuss ways to advance partnerships and address workforce-related challenges in rural areas.

STATSAMERICA

<https://www.statsamerica.org/Default.aspx>

StatsAmerica's regional analysis tools give economic and community developers a quick and easy way to build a concise sense of the economic well-being of their county, state, or town. Researchers have ready access to demographic, educational, income, poverty, labor force, and living arrangements data that can be easily downloaded as either an excel document or in a word-friendly template. The tools contained within and linked to by StatsAmerica are a ready to use arsenal for fast, effective, and reliable regional economic analysis.

StatsAmerica serves as the Economic Development Administration's central hub for easy-to-use, actionable data for economic and community developers. The service is provided by the Indiana Business Research Center with support from EDA and provides tens of thousands of data items from federal, state, and private sources ready for use. Users can find useful tools for developing innovation intelligence and regional profiles, as well as a set of specialized tools and resources for addressing more niche concerns like crosswalking cities to counties, measuring economic distress, or mapping opportunity zones.

The site also provides a host of guides, webinars, and pamphlets outlining how to use its various tools and best practices for working with federal data. These resources are a good starting place for researchers new to the field or established professionals seeking to expand their understanding of the range of available data opportunities. The website also links to a host of other EDA products, including their cluster mapping and LEHD OnTheMap products (see below).

EDA CLUSTER MAPPING

<https://www.clustermapping.us/region>

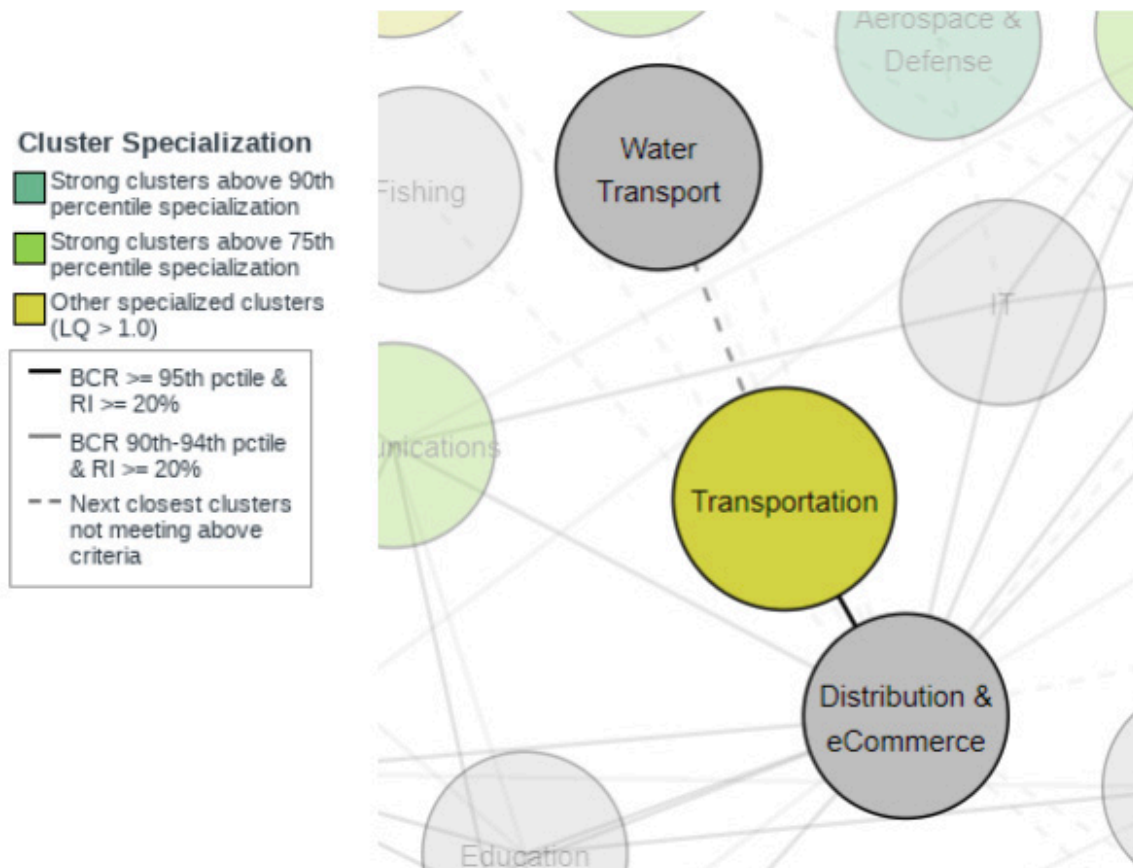
The October 2021 report used cluster analysis to make observations about networks of interrelated industries and identify economic clusters key to regional competitiveness. The report identified key industry clusters in high-tech infrastructure (logistics, power, and data infrastructure), healthcare, and labor-intensive manufacturing. These clusters are highly concentrated in the region and growing, showing great promise.

The Economic Development Administration's Cluster Mapping tool is a resource for expanding understanding of your local and regional economy. The tool allows users to explore a host of economic development indicators for a city or county, including employment, wages, job creation, unemployment, labor force productivity, and innovation. The tool also allows users to view a regional cluster map, highlighting industries with significant regional specialization and highlighting the strength of connection between various clusters. To access the information, follow the link above, click on the region you're interested in viewing on the map, then select "Go to Region Dashboard" in the tooltip.

The Dashboard includes a cluster mapping feature, which allows a user to see the network of industry clusters in their region. For example, below we see the transportation cluster in Little Rock, and we can see that it is strongly connected with distribution and ecommerce (a solid line connects the two clusters, indicating the strength of the relationship between these two clusters is in the 90th to 94th percentile). The transportation cluster has a moderately strong connection with water transportation—a dotted line means that the relationship exists (similar inputs/materials, processes, or products), but is somewhat weaker.

The mustard green color indicates the transportation cluster is somewhat specialized in the region (above average concentration compared to the rest of the country as measured by Location Quotient), with a higher degree of concentration than what is seen at the national level. It is not one of the region's most locally concentrated clusters—a visit to the website will show that aerospace and defense, leather products, paper and packaging, and footwear have a stronger presence in the region compared to the rest of the country. Both water transport and distribution and ecommerce are weakly concentrated in the region (grey, below average concentration).

Example: the Transportation Cluster in Little Rock, AR economic area



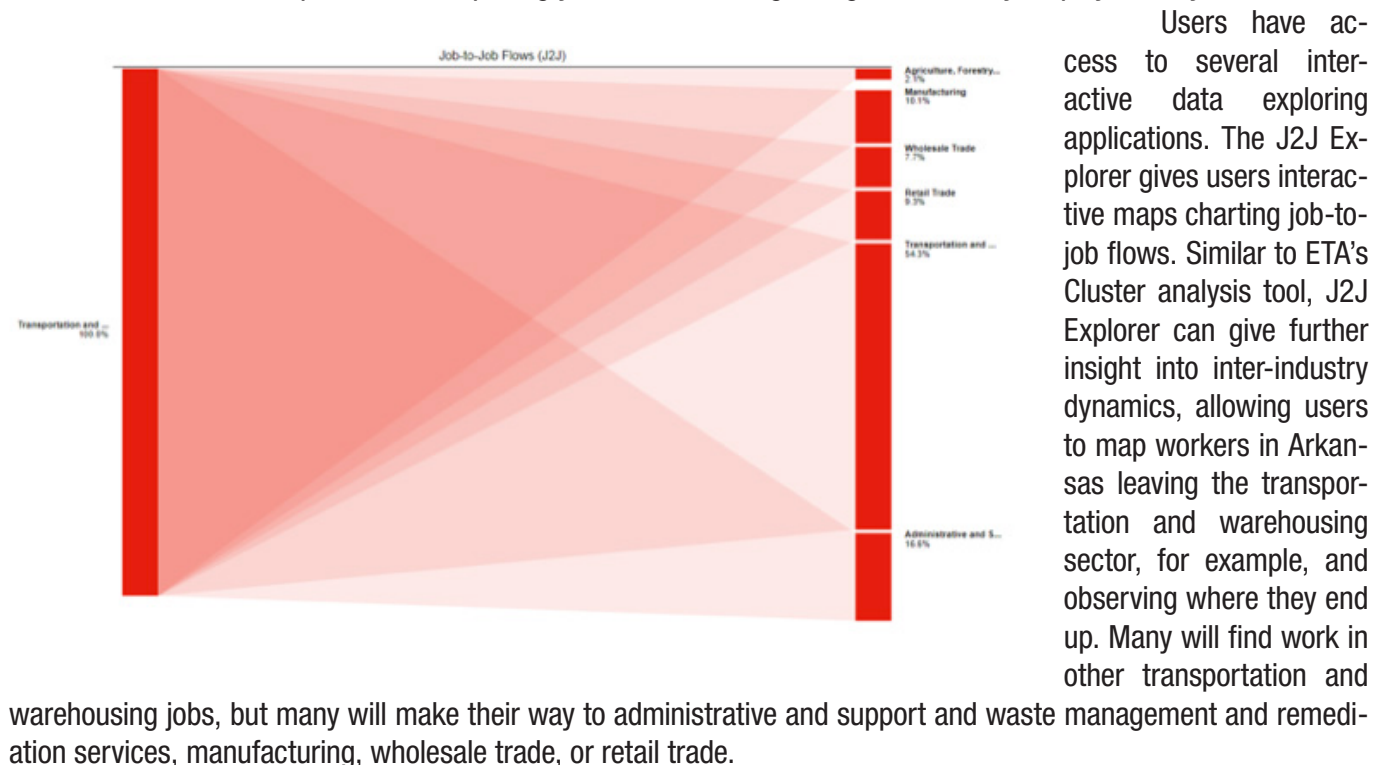
What can I do with this information? This tool can be a resource for local leaders looking to identify prominent industries and promising industry linkages or build up their understanding of economic dynamics in the region. The industry specialization and industry linkages the tool identifies are a starting point for conversations about what additional local information may be needed to target occupational training or upskilling or other supports for industry. Industry partners and local stakeholders often respond well to being presented with this information, as it invites them to share their own experiences of and knowledge about industrial dynamics.

LONGITUDINAL EMPLOYER-HOUSEHOLD DYNAMICS (LEHD)

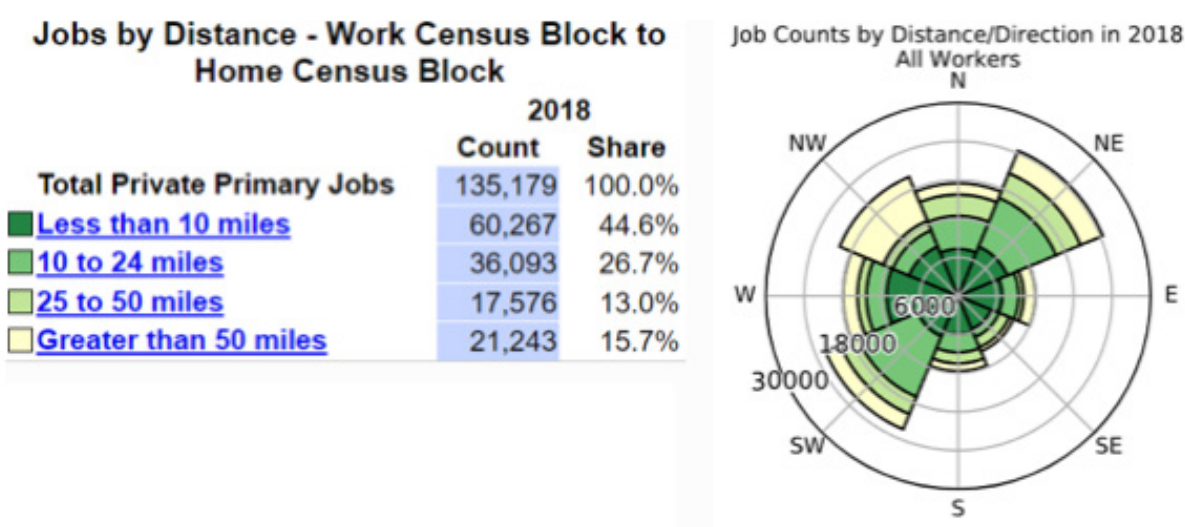
<https://lehd.ces.census.gov/>

Mapping labor sheds is important to understanding workforce mobility and regional industry dynamics. The October 2021 report used labor shed maps, like the ones produced by LEHD, to assess how well target populations are being served by workforce development and training programs. We found that apprenticeship and training programs are not evenly dispersed across the region and that many areas within the Delta face both an educational desert (no formal postsecondary education institutions) and a training desert, greatly limiting upskilling options.

The LEHD program is administered by the Census Bureau and produces new public-use information combining federal, state, and Census data on employers and employees. State and local practitioners can use this resource to collect information about their economies and make informed decisions. The LEHD combines unemployment insurance earnings data with data on employers and demographic detail gathered through the Census. Users can utilize this information in the form of employment, earnings, and job flow statistics at a detailed geographic and industry level. This information is perfect for deepening your understanding of regional industry employment dynamics.



LEHD OnTheMap is an online mapping and reporting tool that shows where workers are employed and where they live, providing companion reports on worker characteristics and allowing users to filter by worker age, earnings, or industry of employment. Users can map employment dynamics, worker flows, and job locations. Exploring the map options for Little Rock, AR, we can see that workers generally work within 24 miles of their home. 45 percent of workers work within 10 miles of their home. Workers generally live northwest, northeast, and southwest of Little Rock city center, with very few workers living to the southeast.



What can I do with this information? LEHD offers several useful tools for identifying and describing regional labor markets. OnTheMap is particularly useful for describing commuting patterns. Other federal data sources struggle to adequately represent worker movements across administrative boundaries, but the unemployment insurance data used in LEHD allows the program to represent true job flows across county, municipal or state boundary lines. This data can help local leaders identify where the workforce lives and works, allowing them to locate training opportunities in convenient and easily accessible areas and identify neighboring regions with which to build partnerships.

Learn More About Key Occupations and Skills

The October 2021 report for the Delta Regional Authority identified top occupation clusters within the region. Semi-skilled service occupations were by far the most prominent in the region in 2019. This wide-reaching and lower-paying occupation cluster, characterized by a shared set of fundamental consumer-facing skills, includes diverse jobs ranging from insurance appraisers, craft artists, and dietetic technicians to bailiffs, animal caretakers, and funeral attendants.

The resources below can help identify other occupations important to specific industry clusters in your region. Top occupations are generally those with high levels of employment, high concentration relative to national levels, higher than average compensation, and/or low barriers to entry for low- to middle-skill workers. The specific parameters for how you will determine which occupations are at the “top” will vary depending on the context of your region and your work. We recommend vetting both your parameters and findings with other stakeholders to ensure that whatever source and method you use accurately reflects the priorities and lived experiences of people in your community.

EMPLOYERS AND THEIR TALENT PROVIDERS

<https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/blog/post/upskilling-reskilling-remain-competitive>

The October 2021 report identified promising employer-led training and employment initiatives including three apprenticeship programs. Employer design and ownership is what makes leading programs so successful.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation has been developing and deploying a Talent Pipeline Management training program for local chambers of commerce that are eager to engage businesses in workforce development on the businesses’ own terms. The training program includes identifying employers’ pain points and creating coalitions of employers that seek to leverage their combined talent demand to capture the attention of their preferred training providers. Employers create common job descriptions for critical roles across the business sector and verify career pathways. The curriculum is built on the idea that employers need to more proactively manage their talent supply just as effectively as they would manage their product and parts supply chains, making investments that link to real returns for businesses through improved worker recruitment and retention.

The talent supply chain includes every movement of a prospective employee through the system from school through multiple feeder jobs to finally fill the critical job that is in demand. The TPM Basic Value Stream Map (https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/sites/default/files/TPM%204.0_Strategy%205.pdf) illustrates the shared responsibilities of talent providers (or “suppliers”) and employers.

Figure 4: Value Stream Map



TPM-inspired programs include the Women Build 901 Too initiative in Memphis, TN, which aims to increase female employment in the construction industry. Several reports describe the statewide TPM program in Kentucky ([TPM Best Practices report](#), [Kentucky progress report](#)).

Rural areas must ensure these programs are effective for their businesses. Instead of industry-wide initiatives, rural organizations might instead focus on developing talent into an occupation that is critical to multiple employers across different industries. The largely rural state of Vermont has been able to use the [TPM approach](#) to engage 100 employers in construction, healthcare, and manufacturing industries.

The TPM curriculum and publications expertly address the challenge of upskilling staff to fill critical positions at their company (<https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/blog/post/upskilling-reskilling-remain-competitive>). The blog referenced here speaks to employers' bottom line, key pain points, and Return on Investment potential. In February 2020, a Chamber Foundation employer survey (https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/sites/default/files/2020_USCCF_ModernTalentMarketplaceHiring.pdf) showed that most respondents acknowledged a need to overhaul their hiring practice to focus on competencies and were confident in their ability to successfully reassess the way they hire. In February 2020, 58 percent said that automation was both an opportunity and a threat to the workforce. Sixty-two percent predicted a further increase in remote work.

Here is an excerpt from the [TPM Academy Strategy 1 – Organize Employer Collaboratives](#):

Table 1.2: Example Chart for Determining the Focus of a Collaborative

Business Functions and Jobs	Talent Challenges	Initial Geographic Area for Collaborative	Shared Need: High (H) Low (L)	Capacity/ Willingness: High (H) Low (L)	Potential ROI Impact: High (H) Low (L)	Urgency to Address Need: High (H) Low (L)
Machining, CNC Machinist	Cost of a hire	3-county region	H	L	H	H
Retail Management, Retail Store Manager	Career advancement and retention	Metro area	H	H	L	H
Nursing, Registered Nurse	Unfilled jobs and insufficient diversity	State	L	H	H	L
Logistics Management, Warehouse Manager	Low retention	7-county rural region	H	H	H	H
Network Administration, Network Manager	High onboarding and training costs	County	L	L	L	H

After identifying the most important shared pain points to address within a geography, and assessing where there is capacity and willingness to work together in ways that can produce impactful and timely results, you will have successfully determined the focus of your collaborative and can move on to organizing and financing it.

The TPM Academy curriculum excerpt demonstrates how a group of employers and their facilitator might determine priorities in advancing a business-led talent development venture. They should consider key business functions and jobs, what is the specific and measurable talent challenge, what is the key geographic area, and is the initiative of interest and urgent to participating employers.

What can I do with this information? The employer collaborative model is not exclusive to the TPM Academy, but the TPM curriculum provides an entry point for understanding employer and industry workforce needs. Employers may already be working together in your region through chambers of commerce, trade and industry associations, or other business forums. These intermediary organizations are well suited to engage in conversations about employers' role in leading talent development initiatives.

COMPETENCY MODEL CLEARINGHOUSE

<https://www.careeronestop.org/CompetencyModel/Competency-Models/pyramid-home.aspx>

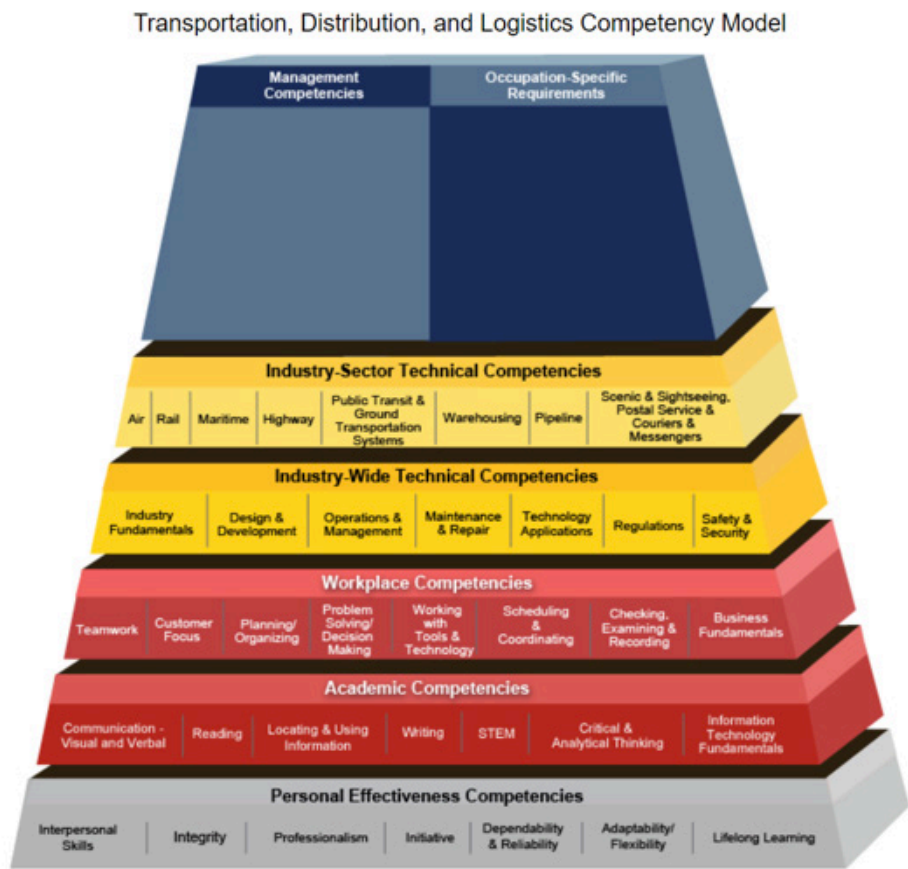
The October 2021 report identified five middle-skill occupations critical to every industry cluster: bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks, maintenance and repair workers, first-line supervisors of office and administrative support workers, executive secretaries and executive administrative assistants, and first-line supervisors of mechanics, installers, and repairers. There is high regional demand for these occupations that is not currently met by the postsecondary education and training system.

The Competency Model Clearinghouse is an initiative sponsored by the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) at the U.S. Department of Labor. ETA engages industry experts to develop a set of competency models to provide clear descriptions of what a person needs to know and be able to do in order to perform a specific job. These dynamic models provide information on the foundational and technical competencies that are necessary in economically vital industries and sectors. The data is provided at the national level, and information is not available for every industry sector-- agriculture, for example, is not currently included. The information that is available can give researchers and practitioners excellent insight into industries they consider important to the economic wellbeing of their region.

The competency models arrange information in a pyramid, with the most basic, personal competencies at the bottom. The large bottom of the triangle symbolizes the large number of workers that need to have these skills. Toward the top of the pyramid, we see the competencies specific to a given workplace or industry sector, and, at the top of the pyramid, competencies unique to an occupation within the target industry. Clicking on a block in the competency model opens a detailed breakout of sub competencies, offering descriptive information about what a worker could be expected to know. Occupation-specific requirements allow a user to open up an O*NET profile for their specific industry or sector of interest. This O*NET view gives the user access to detailed knowledge, skill, and ability requirements for the most common, fastest growing, or most prominent occupations within the sector and is an excellent way for a new user to familiarize themselves with the O*NET database.

Exploring the transportation, distribution, and logistics competency model, we can contrast industry-wide technical competencies (those competencies common across most or all industries within the sector) and industry-sector technical competencies (competencies contextual to a specific industry within the wider sector. The industry fundamentals cell (an industry-wide technical competency) describes the knowledge of the fundamentals of the transportation, distribution, and logistics industry, including transportation modes and the industry's key components. The warehousing industry-sector technical competencies cell, on the other hand, explores the activities required for the operation of warehousing and storage facilities for general merchandise, refrigerated goods, and other warehouse products. This information is far more specific and tailored than the general information of the industry-wide technical competencies.

The transportation, distribution, and logistics competency model does not include any detail specific to management occupations, however other competency models allow a user to explore occupational characteristics specific to management occupations within the sector.



What can I do with this information? These competency models are an excellent entry point to discussions with stakeholders about industry workforce needs. It's likely that regional employers will have differing competency requirements from those outlined in the models and that friction can often spark interesting and lively conversation over local labor dynamics.

O*NET DATABASE
<https://www.onetonline.org/find/industry?i=48&g=Go>

The October 2021 report identified prominent occupation clusters in the Delta Region, grouping occupations by their similar knowledge requirements. The report found that the postsecondary education system was not meeting the talent development needs of key occupations within the Delta Region. These occupations were selected because wages were above average, employment was large, and some training was required beyond high school. The accompanying analysis showed that these key occupations tend to have lower representation of people of color and concentrate women in lower paying roles.

The analysis also found that agriculture/life/natural sciences and engineering/architecture occupational clusters have high numbers of entry-level, middle-skill occupations, potentially providing pathways for incumbent workers looking to upskill and transition to a new occupation.













O*NET OnLine, sponsored by the Employment and Training Administration, is the best source for national occupational skill information. It offers detailed knowledge, ability, skill, and workplace data on occupations as well as providing information about educational and training requirements for specific occupations. The site allows users to browse occupations by industry of employment, letting a user select the largest occupations in an industry or occupations which are almost entirely employed in the specific sector.

Clicking on Occupation-Specific Requirements in the Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics Competency Model (see above), we can see the top occupations ranked by percent of workers employed in the industry sector, projected growth, or projected job openings. Hand laborers and freight, stock, and material movers is the top occupation in terms of projected job growth in the transportation, distribution, and logistics sector. O*NET has tagged the occupation as having a bright outlook, meaning it is expected to grow rapidly in the next several years or will have large numbers of job openings. We can see that 29 percent of these jobs are in the transportation sector, relatively less concentrated in the sector compared to other top sector occupations.

Transportation and Warehousing [Save Table \(XLS/CSV\)](#)

For an overview of the industry, including employment and salary, visit the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) site.

View related industry competency models at CareerOneStop's Competency Model Clearinghouse: [Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics](#).

Sort by: Employed by this industry	Code	Occupation	Projected Growth (2019-2029)	Projected Job Openings (2019-2029)
29%	53-7062.00	Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand 	Average 	380,600
	53-7062.04	Recycling and Reclamation Workers 		
53%	53-3032.00	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers 	Slower than average 	209,200
32%	53-3033.00	Light Truck Drivers 	Faster than average 	111,800
32%		Passenger Vehicle Drivers, Except Bus Drivers, Transit and Intercity	Much faster than average 	104,000
	53-3051.00	Bus Drivers, School 		
	53-3053.00	Shuttle Drivers and Chauffeurs 		
	53-3054.00	Taxi Drivers 		
12%	53-7064.00	Packers and Packagers, Hand	Decline 	75,800

Selecting a specific occupation allows a user to see a breakdown of important tasks, technology skills, knowledge, skills, abilities, work activities, work contexts, job zone classification, education and training requirements, interests, work styles, work values, wages and employment trends for specific regions down to the zip code level, and related occupations. This information, while only available at the national level, provides a tremendous amount of context and detail to conversations about regional employment challenges and opportunities.

Here, we can select hand laborers and freight, stock, and material movers and see a range of sample jobs, such as dock workers, loaders, or warehouse workers. We also get a description of the occupation and a range of in-depth detail on various aspects of the occupation and workers' daily tasks. These include common skills, work activities, tools used, interests, credentials held, and work values. We can also explore related occupations and job openings.

Summary Report for: 53-7062.00 - Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand

Updated 2021
Bright Outlook

Manually move freight, stock, luggage, or other materials, or perform other general labor. Includes all manual laborers not elsewhere classified.

Sample of reported job titles: Dock Worker, Laborer, Line Tender, Loader, Material Handler, Merchandise Pick Up Associate, Receiver, Receiving Associate, Shipping and Receiving Materials Handler, Warehouse Worker

Also see: [Recycling and Reclamation Workers](#)

View report: [Summary](#) [Details](#) [Custom](#) [Easy Read](#) [Veterans](#) [Español](#)

[Tasks](#) | [Technology Skills](#) | [Tools Used](#) | [Knowledge](#) | [Skills](#) | [Abilities](#) | [Work Activities](#) | [Detailed Work Activities](#) | [Work Context](#) | [Job Zone](#) | [Education](#) | [Credentials](#) | [Interests](#) | [Work Styles](#) | [Work Values](#) | [Related Occupations](#) | [Wages & Employment](#) | [Job Openings](#) | [Additional Information](#)

Tasks

5 of 19 displayed

- Move freight, stock, or other materials to and from storage or production areas, loading docks, delivery vehicles, ships, or containers, by hand or using trucks, tractors, or other equipment.
- Sort cargo before loading and unloading.
- Attach identifying tags to containers or mark them with identifying information.
- Read work orders or receive oral instructions to determine work assignments or material or equipment needs.
- Stack cargo in locations, such as transit sheds or in holds of ships as directed, using pallets or cargo boards.

The database allows a user to drill down into each of these categories, so if a user clicks on the first task, for example, they are presented with a detailed task description and a set of related occupations that exhibit closely related tasks.

Related occupations for task:

Move freight, stock, or other materials to and from storage or production areas, loading docks, delivery vehicles, ships, or containers, by hand or using trucks, tractors, or other equipment.

- 53-7064.00 [Packers and Packagers, Hand](#)
3 closely related tasks
 - Obtain, move, and sort products, materials, containers, and orders, using hand tools.
 - Remove completed or defective products or materials, placing them on moving equipment, such as conveyors, or in specified areas, such as loading docks.
 - Transport packages to customers' vehicles.
- 49-9096.00 [Riggers](#) **2 closely related tasks**
- 53-7011.00 [Conveyor Operators and Tenders](#)
2 closely related tasks
- 37-2012.00 [Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners](#)
1 closely related task
- 49-9011.00 [Mechanical Door Repairers](#)
1 closely related task

[See all 18 related occupations >>](#)

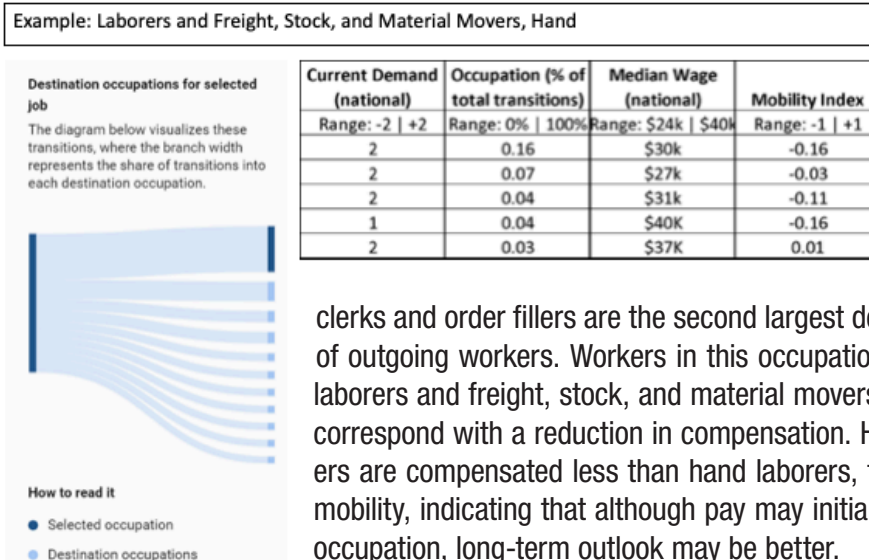
What can I do with this information? O*NET data is incredibly useful for drilling down to specific occupational dynamics underpinning a sector. The database's main limiting factor is that it is only available at the national level. This invites room for stakeholders and local labor experts to weigh in and participate in the conversation, serving as an entry point into conversations about regional occupational dynamics.

BROOKINGS WORKFORCE MOBILITY

<https://www.brookings.edu/interactives/wof-mobility-pathways/>

The October 2021 report identified the need for expanded career ladders and pathways into and through critical occupations. The education and training system will not be able to satisfy the demand for qualified workers and upskilling is needed to ensure the openings in critical occupations will be filled by qualified incumbent workers. Career pathways into these positions, particularly for women and people of color, could be strengthened.

Brookings has developed an innovative tool for identifying promising employment pathways for workers wishing to improve their economic mobility. Users can search for specific occupations and see both where workers transitioning into those jobs come from and where workers transitioning out of those jobs generally go. These employment flows are combined with national demand and median wage information to develop an overall mobility index score for each job. This tool is an excellent resource for practitioners building up talent pipelines. These practitioners can map likely path ways based on state- and city-specific data and further refine these based on the experiences of local workers.



For example, again selecting hand laborers and freight, stock, and material movers, we can see that a plurality (16%) of workers will find employment in the same occupation when looking for a new job. Most, however, will seek employment in other occupations. Stock

clerks and order fillers are the second largest destination for hand laborers, receiving 7% of outgoing workers. Workers in this occupation generally have lower wages than hand laborers and freight, stock, and material movers, indicating that this transition may often correspond with a reduction in compensation. However, while stock clerks and order fillers are compensated less than hand laborers, they generally have higher possibilities of mobility, indicating that although pay may initially dip for a workers transitioning into the occupation, long-term outlook may be better.

CREC has found this tool to be a valuable linkage when drawing relationships between occupations and exploring how workers may view their own career ladders. The tool allows a user to plot out several career moves, exploring how workers generally flow through different occupations and charting the degree to which they can achieve upward mobility. The inbuilt mobility index is a good resource for quickly identifying occupations that may be in need of additional support services, improved employment pipelines, or training.

How can I use this information? This data offers a high-level view of worker mobility within and across occupations. It can serve as a framework when exploring local economic mobility pathways, giving local experts something to respond to and identifying potential areas for training and workforce development to be vetted by local stakeholders.

Explore Promising Practices

EXPAND EARN AND LEARN PROGRAMMING

Companies that survive downturns and labor shortages have learned to grow their own talent and make the most of downturns in the market by focusing on training and upskilling. Registered apprenticeship programs provide a structure for effective training and the strongest programs show a high Return on Investment for employers. But many employers, especially smaller employers in rural areas, will need variations on apprenticeship programs which may not fit the traditional mold. As these programs are adapted, it is important to retain some of the features that make them so successful: an agreement between employer and employee that the training leads to higher wages and a better job, mentorship at the job site, some related instructional programming online or in a classroom, and a transparent plan for building and demonstrating key skills.

It is also important to note that the highest quality Earn and Learn programs are often not accessible to women, people of color, and the working poor. Intentional initiatives to include and support these groups can expand the labor pool for participating firms and their non-participating counterparts. Community-based and non-profit organizations, educational institutions, workforce boards and chambers of commerce can help employers strengthen on site mentoring and link to support services that help workers navigate financial and other challenges as they Earn and Learn.

Pre-apprenticeship programs prepare workers for more formal apprenticeships and can help expand the talent pool for technical positions in various fields. For example, Building Pathways Inc. (BPI), a six-week pre-apprenticeship training program set up by the Boston Building Trades Unions, was founded to diversify their membership and ensure a skilled construction workforce. BPI knows that women graduates may face additional scrutiny in seeking registered apprenticeship opportunities and prepares participants for the skills and training they will need to succeed in a construction apprenticeship. BPI's rigorous training includes a basic understanding of construction math, tool recognition and use, measuring, and blueprint reading as well as hands-on experience at union apprenticeship programs and active construction sites. BPI has an agreement with the building trades that gives program graduates priority when new apprenticeships become available, which has led to a sizable increase in the number of female apprentices in Massachusetts.¹

Another pre-apprenticeship example in the IT field is provided by the Urban Technology Project (UTP), a joint enterprise between Communities in Schools of Philadelphia and the School District of Philadelphia, focusing on “opportunity youth” –young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are not currently working or in school. The Digital Services Fellows (DSF) Pre-Apprenticeship program is for recent Philadelphia high school graduates who are interested in information technology (IT). Participants receive mentorship from a technician or a computer support specialist in how to repair computers, organizational systems, IT project management, and other skills for being a good field support technician. DSF participants who excel are given an opportunity to interview for the registered apprenticeship programs, which typically places 80% of the Pre-Apprenticeship graduates. UTP serves a diverse population, including people with disabilities such as Derek, who has noted that the pre-apprenticeship not only provided him technical training but has also taught him “how to be professional in the working world as a person with a disability.”

EXPLORE DEFINITIONS OF INCLUSION, DIVERSITY, AND EQUITY

Equity is a top issue for federal economic development authorities (<https://eda.gov/about/investment-priorities/>; <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2021/09/24/usda-announces-intent-establish-equity-commission-solicits>). Leading financial institutions recognize that inequality limits growth and development (https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/The-Economic-Gains-from-Equity_Conf-Draft.pdf). Communities across the Delta must define what equity means to them. What commitments are fellow community leaders willing to make and what changes are they seeking in who has access to high quality education, good jobs, and family-supporting wages? While increasing access to opportunity may lead to individuals leaving the community to pursue higher education and better jobs, it can also improve the quality of life and the level of local civic engagement and help drive local investment.

DISCOVER SUCCESSFUL LABOR MARKET REENTRY PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES

<https://www.jacksonsun.com/story/news/2021/04/30/gibson-county-sheriff-major-drop-recidivism-following-groundbreaking-reentry-program/7378787002/>

Focus group conversations with leaders across the Delta Region identified that reentry programming for formerly incarcerated populations provides a potential response to talent shortages, but employer stigma is the singular barrier to hiring.

Labor shortages and talent gaps illuminate the potential for quality reentry services. Many members or soon to be members of the formerly incarcerated population are an untapped source in the labor market. However, correctly targeting services to incarcerated populations is a challenge, especially in rural areas where resources can be limited. Fortunately, successful programs have emerged as models for states and municipalities to follow.

Some areas within the Delta Region already have successful programs that could serve as a reference for pursuing positive outcomes. For example, Gibson County, TN has developed a nationally recognized model called the Re-entry Advanced Manufacturing Program (RAMP). Through a partnership between the local Sheriff's office and the Northwest Tennessee Workforce Board, inmates of the county jail can earn credentials that qualify them for higher pay and quality jobs. Before the program, the overall recidivism rate was over 70%. Now, for those that have gone through the program, the recidivism rate is 12%.

EXPLORE CRIMESOLUTIONS

<https://crimesolutions.ojp.gov/>

For a broader look at criminal justice reform and reentry services, access the National Institute of Justice's CrimeSolutions database. CrimeSolutions is a searchable clearinghouse of both programs and practices, including reentry services. Programs are "a specific set of activities carried out according to guidelines to achieve a defined purpose" and practices are "a general category of programs, strategies, or procedures that share similar characteristics with regard to the issues they address and how they address them." Each program or practice undergoes a closely monitored evidence-based study, which is used to rate the program or practice as effective, promising, or no effect. An additional category lists if the rating is based on one or multiple studies. Criminal justice practitioners, policymakers, trainers, and researchers alike can utilize the repository to optimize reentry services and other aspects of criminal justice reform. 8 of the programs in the database fall within the Delta Region. Users can filter searches across

a variety of categories including by rating, type of service, topic, gender, age, race, and geography (rural or urban). Contact CrimeSolutions for additional information or if you want to submit a program or practice for consideration.

How can I use this information? Successful reentry programs within the Delta Region demonstrate ways that employers and workforce providers can collaborate to address major barriers to work and support returning labor market entrants. If this type of program would be of interest to employers you serve, explore the partnership models here and consider strategic partners that can help move programs forward for employers in your region. These programs may also serve as starting points for developing new ideas to engage the formerly incarcerated population and other populations that may seek to return to work.

SUPPORT RECOVERY TO WORK

<https://crecstorage.blob.core.windows.net/ddaa/sites/6/2021/08/CREC-Brochure-High-Rez-Digital.pdf>

Like many other regions, employers and communities in the Delta Region are considering how to more systematically address substance use disorder. ARC's Recovery to Work Initiative introduced a number of programs that advance different complementary approaches and contribute to a more cohesive recovery to work ecosystem.

Substance use disorder (SUD) is a major barrier to a healthy economy, keeping workers from retaining employment. Active organizations and researchers have found that a strong recovery-to-work ecosystem is needed to remove the many obstacles facing workers and their communities. Strategic collaboration is necessary to target scarce resources and employers are key to the system. As regional conveners, local development districts (LDD) can leverage their relationships to cultivate a rich ecosystem where potential employers and those with SUD can access the resources they need. Wrap-around services like transportation, healthcare, and childcare often operate in silos, so mapping regional assets is a good first step to fostering a cohesive ecosystem.

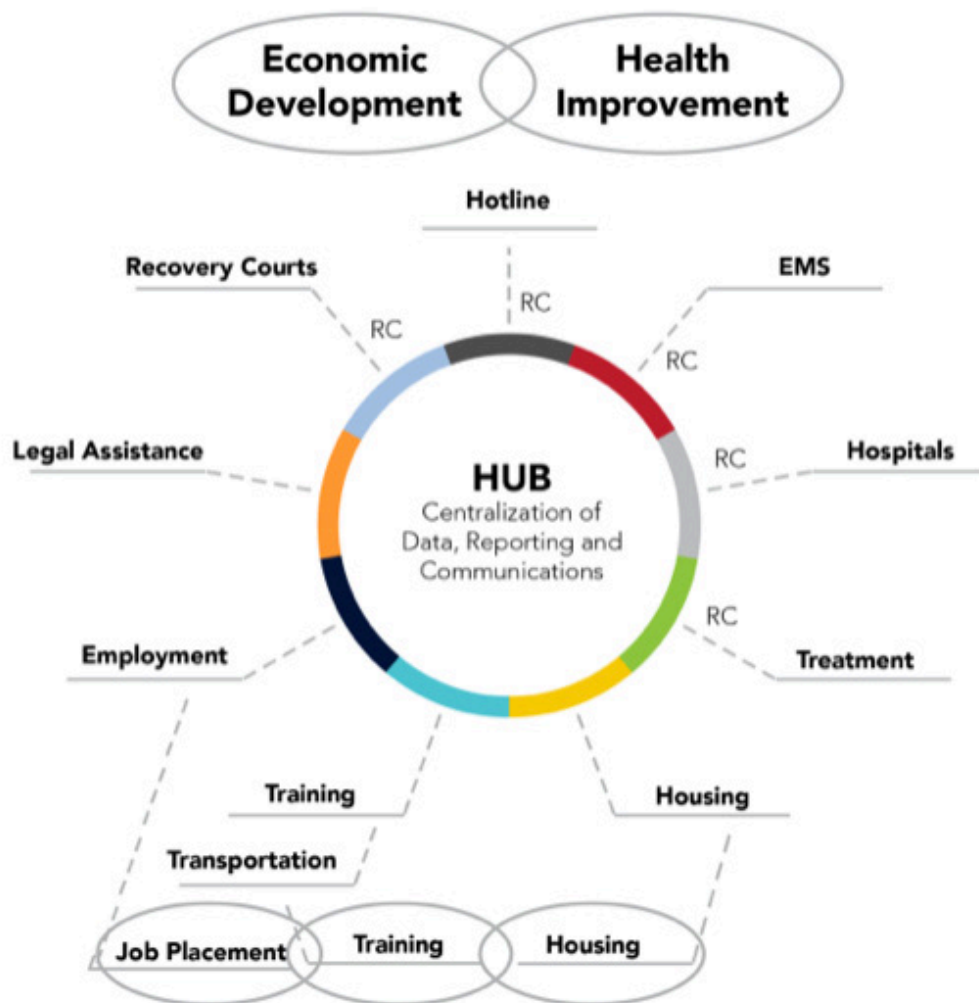
On one hand, many people with SUD are seeking a second chance and ready to take the steps to recover from addiction and rejoin the workforce. On the other hand, some employers may be apprehensive to hire someone with SUD. Thus, framing treatment as a talent solution to workforce development barriers can broaden interest. Speaking to an employer's bottom-line can open skeptical businesses to the idea of hiring someone in recovery.

Yet, without long-term funding for recovery programs, this ecosystem can break down. Relying on good will and one-off funds like grants is unsustainable. Capitalizing on motivated businesses and political leaders can support sustainable funding for much-needed programming. With adequate government funds, services are continuous and there is less emphasis on seeking outside financial support.

The following images are from an August 2021 report from ARC and the Development District Association of Appalachia. The UCHRA model was developed by the Upper Cumberland Human Resources Agency (representing 172 local agencies, organizations, groups, and churches) with the fourteen-county Upper Cumberland Development District (UCDD). A Substance Abuse Solutions (SAS) department (the "Hub") was established at the UCHRA to coordinate the various service providers and offerings. Individuals referred to the Hub are matched with a treatment center and a peer-caseworker who guides that person through treatment, services, and employment.

The August 2021 report describes how ensuring that people in recovery from substance use disorder are fully employed and productive has both economic and social benefits.

Figure1: UCHRA Substance Abuse Solutions Hub-and-Spoke Model



The Bipartisan Policy Center tracked federal funding for the opioid crisis and their findings emphasize the importance of having funding sources that ensure service can be sustained, and multiple sources of funding, like state and local budget line items in addition to federal grants (<https://bipartisanpolicy.org/download/?file=/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Tracking-Federal-Funding-to-Combat-the-Opioid-Crisis.pdf>). Solutions to substance abuse are

Figure 3: Substance Use Disorder Recovery-to-Work Ecosystem Model Developed for the Southern Tier Industry Summit



multi-dimensional and therefore rely on a range of services. This innate complexity results in a seemingly sporadic direction of grant funds, which diminishes chances to coordinate. Given the number of grants distributed, it is difficult to always track what entity ultimately receives funds and how those funds are used. Relevant agencies must partner and foster a strong ecosystem to ensure services are evidence-based and holistically address substance abuse, while also limiting overlap.

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) has advanced several programs and reported that a strong recovery-to-work ecosystem of people in recovery, support service providers, resources, businesses, law enforcement, and other key stakeholders can strengthen regional and local economies. Of these programs, the POWER Initiative stands out as a particularly multi-faceted approach (<https://www.arc.gov/arcs-power-initiative/>). This program targets federal resources to communities with major job losses. Much of the funding is dedicated to economic diversification to invite investment and develop the workforce. However, millions of POWER Initiative dollars are also allocated to bolster recovery efforts. Making the connection between recovery, business needs, and workforce development nurtures a more harmonious recovery-to-work ecosystem.

How can I use this information? Like reentry services, recovery-to-work ecosystems consolidate collaborative efforts to bolster regional and local economies and reintroduce another willing and capable segment of the population to the workforce. Use ARC's model to consider how local development leaders can form strategic partnerships between employers, service providers, and other stakeholders.

SEARCH WORKFORCEGPS

<https://www.workforcegps.org/>

Speaking to stakeholders, CREC identified a strong need for actionable, concise resources for local economic and workforce development professionals. The WorkforceGPS platform is an excellent starting place when looking for this type of information, covers a broad range of topics, and is continuously updated.

WorkforceGPS is an online technical assistance website sponsored by the Employment and Training Administration. It collects resources, develops curated communities of interest, and provides webinars and training resources. Workforce professionals, educators, and business leaders can use it to access promising workforce development practices and relevant evidence-based research. If a user wishes, they can share their own resources and best practices, contributing to the site's growing body of knowledge. Resources can be filtered by category or subject matter, such as "activities" or "career information counseling". Users can also search for specific keywords or phrases in the resource database. For users wishing to pursue ETA grant opportunities, the site also features a set of resources in support of many of ETA's competitive grant programs and information on getting a grant. Members can join communities, allowing them to see a selected set of shared resources specific to their community.

WorkforceGPS resources can be filtered to show those relevant to specific states or to rural communities. At time of writing, there are 82 resources in the database pertaining to rural communities. These resources include articles, webinars, how-to guides, research and evaluation reports, and even a podcast. Content ranges widely from developing communication tools to engage farmworkers to grantmaking announcements, to information on HHS poverty guidelines and Census poverty thresholds. The database contains a wealth of shared knowledge, best practices, and directly actionable resources and toolkits ready for use in the field.

Show <input type="text" value="25"/> entries	Showing 1 to 25 of 82 entries
Sorted by: Relevance ↑↓	
Communication Tools to Engage Farmworker Participants The communication tools featured on this resource page provide templates for you to use as you promote your program's attributes among farmworkers and agricultural employers.	Type: Resource Views: 851 Likes: 5 Posted On: 6/9/2015
Voices from the Field: Maudeline National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) participants share their unique stories.	Type: Resource Views: 82 Likes: 0 Posted On: 4/14/2016
Voices from the Field: Fernando and Monica National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) participants share their unique stories.	Type: Resource Views: 105 Likes: 0 Posted On: 4/14/2016

How can I use this information? The wide range of resources contained in WorkforceGPS make it an easy and useful starting point when collecting information on best practices and promising strategies. The information found in the repository should be bolstered by best practices, evidence, and strategies from the local region, ensuring programs developed as a result of the research are tailored to the needs and strengths of the local area.

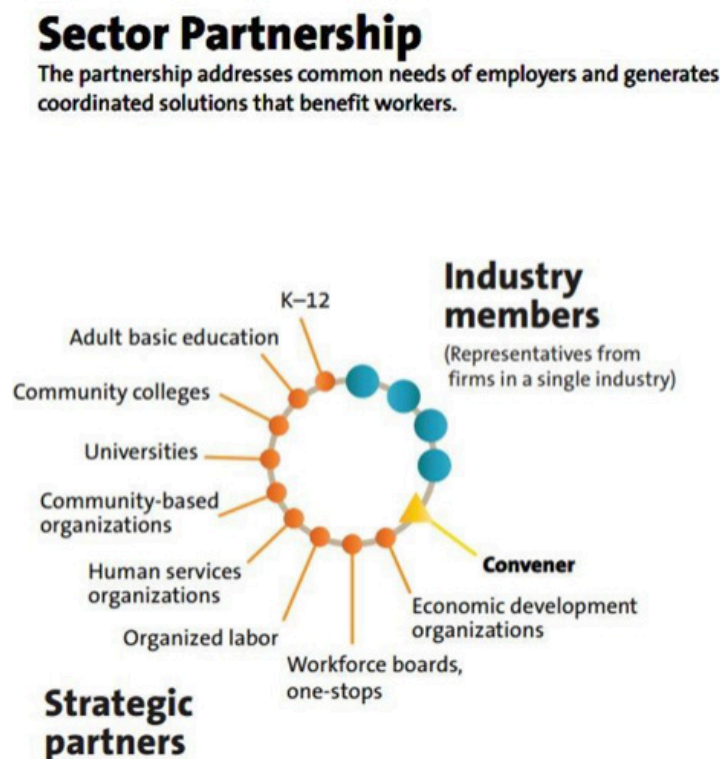
Bringing it Together – Approaches that Work for Rural Areas

In recent years, there has been an increase of workforce development efforts throughout the country. Though many of the most well-known initiatives have focused on cities and urban regions, similarly promising efforts are emerging from rural communities. Challenges and opportunities in each community are different and require locally grown solutions. Rural areas tend to face several challenges to retain and attract talented workers compared to their urban counterparts, due to the lower number of jobs available and population decline. Strong quality of life factors can bolster the chances that young people will return to their communities and young professionals will locate their family and work in small towns. These include practical amenities, broadband internet, attractions that promote diversity, history, and natural resources, and events that celebrate local tradition as well as connections to larger towns and metros.

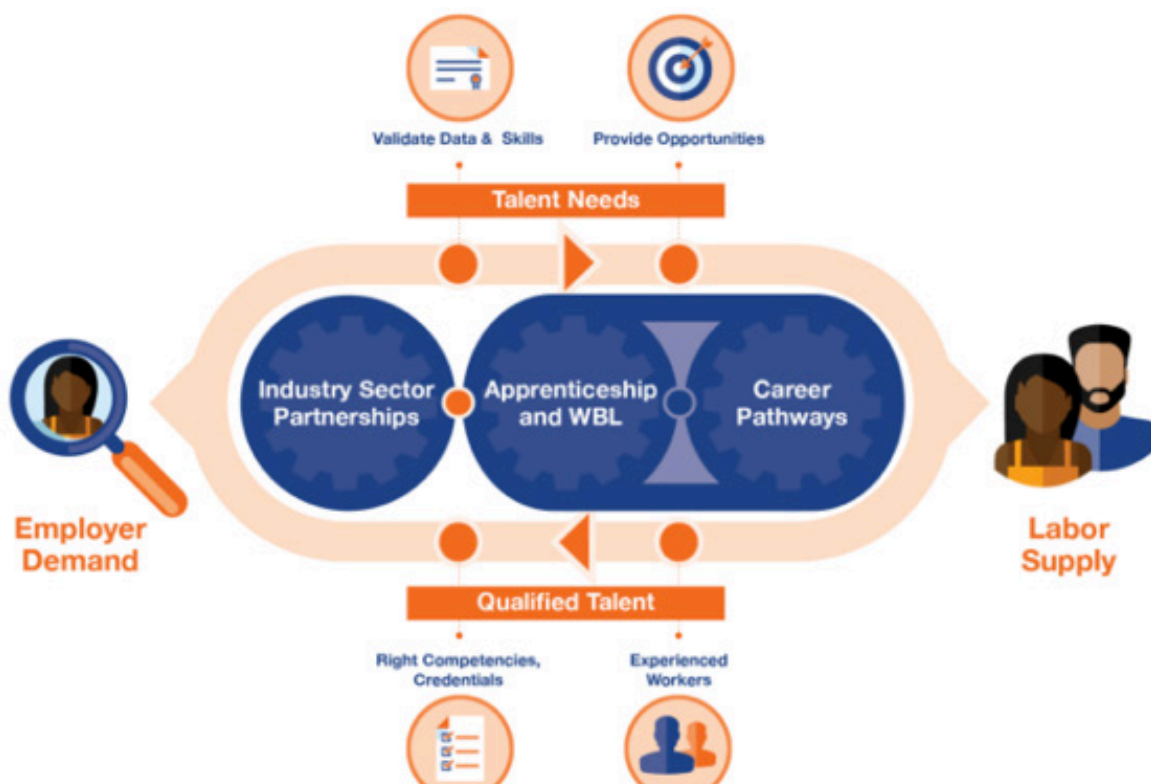
Understanding what resources are available in your community, identifying gaps to improve the workforce system, and leveraging existing assets can help improve economic outcomes for rural residents. For example: which organizations and leaders have the financial and community support they need to contribute to local development? Do engaged organizations and individuals reflect the potential for diversity in the region? What strategy and urgent issue will galvanize interest and energy to advance progress?

Key stakeholders may include local and regional workforce boards, Chamber of Commerce, employers, education and training providers, federal, state, and local government, community and civic organizations. By establishing connections between stakeholders, local and community leaders can help develop a network that can solve persistent challenges. The network should draw on assets and resources from within and outside of the local area.

The following image, from a report by the National Governor's Association, National Skills Coalition, and Corporation for a Skilled Workforce, shows the various potential stakeholders. In any given area, only one or two of these organizations may have the resources and motivation to lead workforce development initiatives.

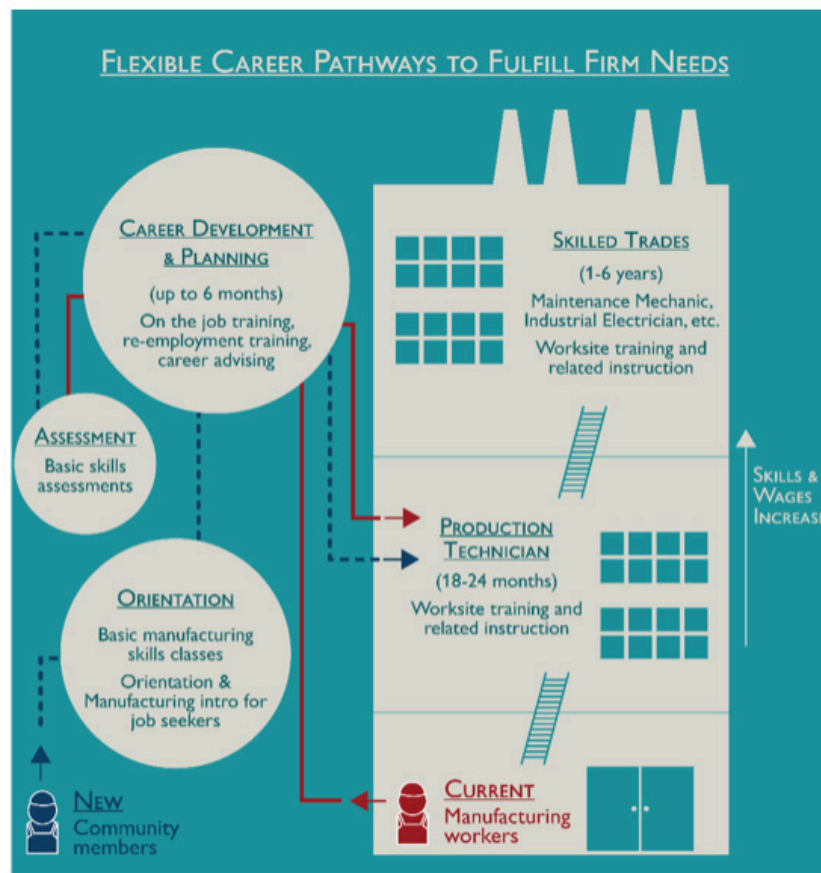


Partners may play different roles in organizing different aspects of the talent development system. The following image is from a report on Sector Strategies by the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration.



With committed employers and other community-based partners engaged, training and upskilling systems can be developed for a specific industry or a group of businesses to increase their capabilities while ensuring on-ramps for job seekers from high school, from unemployment, and from the incumbent workforce to well-paying jobs.

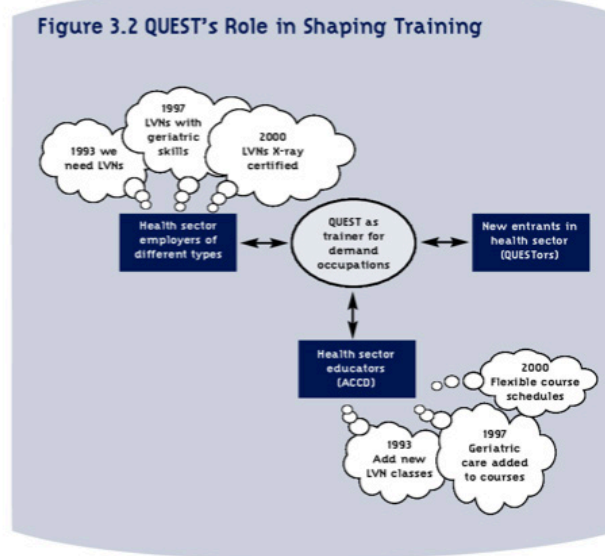
The following image is adapted from a report by the Center on Wisconsin Strategy (COWS) about an Industrial Manufacturing Technician (IMT - <https://www.imtapprenticeship.org/>) Apprenticeship program for front-line manufacturing production workers who need to upskill. The IMT model is used by food processing operations, foundries, plastics and bio-medical production facilities. A critical design feature is that the 18-month, 3,000-hour apprenticeship helps the industry both attract new talent and keep lower-skilled workers engaged as they earn and learn for better pay. The apprenticeship is accessible for job seekers and employees in an entry level position.



These training systems may grow to include a large role for community partners, business and worker advocates, coaches and counselors. For example, leading philanthropic organizations serving urban areas have subsidized the cost of coaches to groups of businesses that seek to provide turnover-reduction support to their workers. The workers also get access to financial advice and resources.

The following images are from a 2001 report on a leading training program developed by a community-based organization in the 1990s. This program, built by a community in partnership with employers, is now one of the most proven and reputable training programs in the country (<https://www.aecf.org/blog/project-quest-workforce-development-that-works>). The 2001 report was written by Ida Rademacher, Marshall Bear, and Maureen Conway (“Project QUEST: A Case Study of a Sectoral Employment Development Approach”). Maureen Conway went on to lead the Economic Opportunities Program at the Aspen Institute, one of the most comprehensive centers of training for organizations and individuals seeking to facilitate mutually beneficial training and upskilling solutions for businesses and workers (<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/economic-opportunities-program/>).

As you can see from the following images, sometimes the simplest models can be the most successful.



Each community in the Delta region has a unique combination of assets which they can leverage to increase human capital. Identifying, strengthening, and building upon these assets can help rural communities grow and promote resilience. Connecting and leveraging nearby assets and linking to new resources from outside the region can foster business development and entrepreneurial solutions for the local area.

Below are some ideas for focused asset development that will support talent development initiatives.

Engage anchor institutions

Anchor institutions are the organizations in a region that have a large employment and purchasing footprint and can help to advance community initiatives. Communities can leverage nearby anchor institutions (i.e. colleges and universities or hospital systems) to help identify jobs and upskilling opportunities that can be extended to rural areas (see this story about the role of higher ed in West Texas: <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/blog/post/country-lends-itself-bigness-texas-size-importance-higher-ed-s-role-rural-workforce>), to promote innovation at local high schools and in workforce training programs, and to provide services to local firms and entrepreneurs. Anchor institutions can facilitate job pathways by moving entry-level low-skill employees to better opportunities in their own

system (e.g., from janitor to lab maintenance). They also purchase many different types of products, some which may be sourced from businesses in nearby rural areas.

Make sure state business incentive programs work for rural areas

Talent shortage is a major workforce challenge for the DRA region. Rural areas are seeing a substantial number of educated persons emigrate to urban areas, but few have their own budgets for talent attraction marketing campaigns.

State-led remote worker programs aim to attract professionals who perform most of their employment duties remotely from a home office or co-working space to relocate while relocation incentives aim to attract workers to a state or region to work for an in-state employer. A few states have advanced incentives for workers to locate in rural areas (Vermont's New Relocating Worker Grant and New Remote Worker Grant <https://thinkvermont.com/relocation-incentives/> and West Virginia's Relocation Package <https://ascendwv.com/>). The city of Tulsa has its own Remote Grant program <https://tulsaremove.com/>

It is also important to ensure that rural businesses have access to state financial incentives for training and upskilling their workers. Small businesses need support to navigate the complex web of state requirements and fill out the onerous paperwork.

Support community-based solutions to broadband issues

The demand for internet connectivity will increase in the years ahead. Internet solutions are critical for businesses, remote workers, and increasingly for daily life, especially where wireless phone service is limited. Oregon has a Rural Broadband Capacity Program - <https://www.oregon4biz.com/Broadband-Office/Rural-Broadband-Capacity-Program/> - and towns in North Carolina and Georgia have set up their own Community WiFi Hotspots:

- Carrboro NC: <https://townofcarrboro.org/971/Free-Public-Wi-Fi-TOCWIRELESSNET>
 - Free public wifi offered in many locations around the downtown area
 - Utilizes existing town-owned network infrastructure and volunteer efforts by the community to minimize cost
- Peachtree City, GA: <https://peachtree-city.org/283/PTC-Wi-Fi-Access>
 - Free wifi at specific public locations
 - DSL speeds, not Broadband

Embrace learning and problem solving

Rural areas are home to entrepreneurs and potential entrepreneurs that can advance solutions to local problems, build businesses that generate wealth in the community, or champion cutting-edge workforce programs. Innovative business and non-profit initiatives can complement workforce development initiatives, helping the business community to expand. States can help here too by supporting high tech businesses that want to hire or relocate remote workers. In 2018, the Utah Legislature passed HB 390 to administer rural employment expansion grants to businesses that create jobs locally, remotely, online, or in a "satellite hub" in counties with a population of less than 31,000 (<https://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/boosting-america-s-rural-workforce.aspx>).

These problem-solving skills are in high demand nationwide. Make sure your community is notorious for problem solving and innovation. Urban dwellers and innovative business owners need to know that innovation and learning are not exclusive to cities. But rural areas also must link to initiatives outside their borders to remain competitive. For example, students in Career and Technical Education programs can seek to [compete at the SkillsUSA](#) national






competition [supported by leaders](#) in Alabama, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and in nearby states.

Center high schools in civic life

Quality of life initiatives can strengthen the sense of community and are critical for attracting high-skilled workers and their families. Local and community leaders can make strategic investments in infrastructure, social services, and amenities, as well as in beautification and recreation. Access to community spaces can help improve quality of life. And all these initiatives can be launched in partnership with area high schools.

These initiatives help young people to build skills and help leaders connect with each other. Civic leaders can build a trail and support learners across the community. High schools can be a hub for planning and a hub for creativity, engaging students and their parents in learning, bringing new ideas into the community, and providing students with opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills. High schools can engage businesses in career exploration activities, introduce them to students, and create opportunities for learning about new technology together. High schools can and should engage area anchor institutions, especially large employers, universities and community colleges, to support their programming.

USDA Resource Guide for Rural Workforce Development

Rural Workforce Resource Guide Matrix				
 Customers*	 Workforce Development Planning	 Infrastructure and Equipment <i>Utilities, transportation, workforce housing, training centers, end-use equipment</i>	 Industry and Employer Engagement, Entrepreneurship, Local Business Development <i>Employer-based curriculum design, business site consulting</i>	 Education, Training, Apprenticeship <i>Higher education, skills-based training, vocational training, on-the-job training</i>
Universities/Community Colleges/Educational Institutions: Universities, community colleges, technology institutes, vocational and technical schools, etc.	Rural Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rural Business Development Grants Rural Community Development Initiative Grants Water and Environmental Programs Sustainable Management Tools 	Rural Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rural Business Development Grants Tribal College Initiative Grant Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program (RMAP) 	Rural Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rural Business Development Grants Rural Community Development Initiative Grants Rural Cooperative Development Grant Program (RCDG) Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program (RMAP) National Institute of Food and Agriculture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AgrAbility - Assistive Technology Program for Farmers with Disabilities Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Socially-Disadvantaged Farmers & Ranchers & Veteran Farmers & Ranchers Program 	Rural Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rural Business Development Grants Rural Cooperative Development Grant Program (RCDG) Water and Environmental Programs Sustainable Management Tools Water and Environmental Programs Solid Waste Management Grants Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program (RMAP) U.S. Forest Service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> US Forest Service Youth Workforce Development Programs National Institute of Food and Agriculture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AgrAbility - Assistive Technology Program for Farmers with Disabilities AFRI Education and Workforce Development Program Higher Education Multicultural Scholars Program (MSP) National Needs Graduate and Postgraduate Fellowship Grants Program Funding Opportunity (NNF) Women and Minorities in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Fields Grant Program (WAMS) Hispanic-Serving Institutions Education Grants Program (HSI) Veterinary Services Grant Program (VSGP) Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Socially-Disadvantaged Farmers & Ranchers & Veteran Farmers & Ranchers Program

Additional Resources

Federal Funding for Apprenticeship Expansion

<https://www.apprenticeship.gov/investments-tax-credits-and-tuition-support/open-funding-opportunities>

Workforce Opportunity for Rural Communities Initiative

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/dislocated-workers/grants/workforce-opportunity>

USDA Resource Guide for Rural Workforce Development

https://www.rd.usda.gov/sites/default/files/060721-ic-ruralworkforceguide-final508.pdf?utm_source=Resource_Guide&utm_medium=PDF&utm_content=6_10_21&utm_campaign=Rural_Workforce

USDA Rural Workforce Innovation Network

<https://www.rd.usda.gov/rwin>

Strengthening Workforce Development in Rural Areas, 2019 Federal Reserve System

<https://www.investinwork.org/-/media/70C24C40AC3C48E988C314CD82C9C180.ashx>

NCSL Boosting America's Rural Workforce

<https://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/boosting-america-s-rural-workforce.aspx>

Preventing And Reversing Brain Drain, Harvard Business Review

https://www.worldgovernmentsummit.org/docs/default-source/publication/2016/hbr_brain-drain/hbr_brain-drain_en.pdf?sfvrsn=9fa40c0a_2

This guide, published by the USDA, highlights workforce development planning, infrastructure and equipment financing, industry and employer engagement, entrepreneurship, and local business development, and education, training, and apprenticeship. These four areas are essential to building a stronger rural workforce and funding opportunities and example programs are provided for each.

The rural workforce resource guide matrix breaks out resources for each area for different types of customers. This gives tailored options to for-profit businesses, public entities, nonprofits, and postsecondary educational institutions. Users can easily find the set of resources that pertains to their specific interests and needs and because the document is hyperlinked, quickly navigate to the correct page pertaining to their target resource.



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